

ON URBAN (IN)VISIBILITIES

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INTRODUCTION

Taking an essentially theoretical and reflexive approach, the present chapter will consider the city as a communicational eco-system. Notwithstanding the essayistic nature of the text, I must nevertheless acknowledge the strong connection binding it to a number of empirical investigations carried out by myself over the years which, given their focus on the city, address the means used by certain social circles or communities to construct special forms of communication and representation. It is not just the theme of the city that said investigations have in common, but also the juvenile nature of the groups and communities under analysis. Having studied squatter youth groups (Grácio et al.: 2000), the hip-hop movement (Simões et al., 2005), graffiti writers (Campos, 2009a, 2009b, 2010) and more recently black protest rap (Campos and Simões, 2011, 2014), I have gained a deep understanding of how certain youth cultures operate in the city using their resources for communicational ends.

The foundations of sociological and anthropological thought are brought to bear on a reflection that can be situated in the somewhat diffuse field of communication. Knowing that communication is a basic feature of community life, and thus a central pillar of any thorough research on its cultural and social contexts, we should not find this combination strange. Not only does communication support some of the critical foundations on which collective identities are built, but as a result it also allows us to distinguish greatly diverse ways of life that make up our world. Something which all peoples and communities have in common is their ability to use the body, dress codes, and a whole array of other artifacts taken from material culture to codify forms of symbolic distinction on a visual level.

Communication is herein understood to mean all forms of symbolic expression that use a system of culturally conventionalized codes to relay information. Considering this definition, we can identify different means of communication that make use of the body, including: the verbal kind (languages, dialects, various kinds of utterances, etc.) and the non-verbal (postures, gestures, dress codes, etc.); the development of different sorts of expressive formats (writing, music, painting, etc.); and the production of a variety of material objects (tools, instruments, buildings, etc.). Thus the spectrum of communication is considered here in the broadest possible perspective, basically encompassing all human actions and productions. In other words, I conceive social action as being inherently symbolic and therefore communicational. Every action is

performed within a given cultural setting and conveys a specific meaning. Likewise, all human creations are laden with significance regardless of their practical purpose.

How does this notion apply to the urban environment? To begin with, we must reflect on its relationship with territory. All inhabited territory is necessarily shaped by the human hand according to its needs and desires. The landscapes that we see before us, even when they emerge as a work of nature or an accident of time are the corollary of all kinds of human intervention, from the most insignificant mark to the most ambitious enterprise. From deforestation to cultivation, from destruction to construction, mankind has erected its inhabited landscapes in a permanent dialogue with nature and its available material and natural resources. While the bucolic spaces of the countryside are less prone to reflections on the production of space, the same cannot be said of urban sites. Cities are almost entirely a by-product of various 'creative operations' meant to establish a collectively inhabitable territory, which in turn result from the confrontation between the features of the terrain and a certain 'territorial worldview' (an ideology of inhabited space and its occupation). Today's cities are spaces of concrete and asphalt, of all types of conduit networks (water, sewage, electrical and optical fibergrids, underground transportation systems, etc.), which include both domesticated natural spaces (parks and gardens) and many different constructions (houses, public services, monuments, sports stadiums, etc.) as well as various equipment (transportation systems, ATM machines, public telephones, traffic lights, etc.). They are not, however, inanimate spaces. They accommodate thousands or millions of people who contribute daily to make the city a living entity, not just through the incorporation of their existence into the habitat, but also through small interventions that help to alter the face of urban spaces.

The visual dimension is unquestionably a very significant, if not central, aspect of how cities are configured, both from an objective and material perspective and from the more subjective viewpoint of the representations and imaginings that they elicit. The present discussion aims precisely to address this dimension, focusing specifically on the central role played by vision in many urban devices and communicational circuits. In many senses, cities are built for vision, and the gaze has always been an essential means of orientation in this environment, as in fact some of the classical authors in the social sciences pointed out in the first decades of the past century (Benjamin, 1997 [1935]; Simmel, 1997 [1903]; Wirth, 1997 [1938]). Despite not being a new subject, today it acquires new features and a renewed relevance which deserve the attention of urban scholars.

THE VISUAL CONDITION

There is nothing new in the claim that the city is a communicational environment, to the point where it may sound like a cliché. Even so, I cannot stress enough the heuristic relevance that this notion continues to hold for our reflection on the contemporary city. Why? Because if, on the one hand, as I have already mentioned, all constructed space is inherently communicational, on the other hand I believe that the last decades have been

marked by the intensification and expansion of communication devices, which tend to assume an increasingly central role in our daily life. In other words, I propose that in our materially and technologically suffused societies, not only has the communicational field become more complex, but it has also permeated everyday life. This claim might seem paradoxical in light of my previous contention that all social action (and its consequences) is a collective manifestation of a communicational nature. What in fact I am trying to sustain is that the purpose of communication has become so crucial to all our actions that in a certain sense it inverts the order of priorities that served its original purpose. Thus, the functional or practical nature of many daily gestures is overridden by their communicational urgency. This becomes obvious in many of the theories that invoke the growing 'stylization' or 'aesthetization' of everyday life (Ewen, 1988; Featherstone, 1991, 1998). An example that is somehow paradigmatic of this can be found in the way the body has increasingly become an object of communication. Clothing, ornamentation, tattoos, and even plastic surgery, conjure up a mutant and performative body, an object of communication 'par excellence' (Santaella, 2004). Le Breton (2003: 28) states that 'anatomy is no longer a predestination ... the body has become a temporary representation, a gadget, an ideal stage for special effects'. This does not mean that the body is not an object of communication in other cultures and historical periods. Nevertheless, the significant value of matter gains extraordinary importance in how we interpret and describe the world, in a society marked by the power of appearances and surface value (Ewen, 1988), where the mutability and plasticity of objects is commonplace. Our actions are therefore increasingly imbued with performativity.

The problem of 'visibility', despite being largely ignored by the social sciences, remains a most relevant social fact, as Brighenti reminds us (2007, 2010). Visibility occupies a vital place in how we relate to the world and to others. This fact brings us to the role of vision, an essential instrument of perception, which, according to a number of authors, has been privileged in western societies throughout the centuries (Classen, 1997; Jenks, 1995; Synnott, 1992). The much-vaunted western ocularcentrism is thus derived from this symbolical and practical favoring of vision, revealed in its recognition as the noblest of the senses. To begin with, it is the sensory organ most universally associated with knowledge and reason throughout history, dating back to Classical Antiquity, when authors such as Plato and Aristotle expounded the epistemological function of vision (Synnott, 1992). However, as the social scientists studying the history and anthropology of the senses have shown us (Classen, 1997, 2005; Howes, 2005), there are many different 'sensory models'. Sensory hierarchies differ according not only to culture, but also to variables of a social nature.

But even considering these reservations, the argument that our culture is deeply ocularcentric seems undisputable. This is confirmed not only by a long tradition of western thought championing the power and nobility of vision, but also by the constant development of technology that is not merely based on vision, but actually seeks to enhance its capacity and widen the horizon of human perception. Today we have the ability to obtain detailed imaging of the human body, of microscopic organisms or distant planets, to give just a few examples. The 'visualization of existence', to use the fitting expression coined by Mirzoeff (1999), points precisely to this culturally shaped

disposition to create an extensive imaging perception of reality. As the author tells us, 'Modern life takes place on screen' (Mirzoeff, 1999: 1).

In short, the problem of visibility is certainly not a minor issue. When we invoke visibility, we are necessarily highlighting the operations that stand between what our gaze can and cannot gauge. We are therefore referring to the relationships that are established within the parameters of 'seeing' and 'being seen'. Although at a first glance this may seem easy to discern, upon closer inspection we find that charting the geographies of (in)visibility is an altogether more difficult task; first of all because each of us has a different viewpoint and therefore a different perspective, and thus the scope of visibility is radically complex and variable. What we see may be hidden from the gaze of others, and conversely what others can perceive is often unavailable to us. Furthermore, the gaze is actually mediated by a number of technological devices, a fact which renders many of our attempts to get a glimpse of reality a considerably more complicated matter. The use of visual reproduction and recording devices changes our perception, to the point of extending it beyond the scope of the naturally visible. And as Robins (1996) shows us, vision has always been a crucial strategic device in the establishment of power relations. The visible and the invisible are therefore intimately connected. We have only to consider a simple example such as walls,¹ and how they create a boundary of (in)visibility, to find that while being an instrument of segregation, hiding from one side what it reveals to the other, they create two separate visible worlds. To render (in)visible is an act of extreme socio-anthropological relevance. It carries deep symbolical and communicational meaning, telling us a lot about a specific individual or community. How we decorate our homes, for instance, or hide certain parts of our body whilst showing others, is not fortuitous. We should also point out that (in)visibility is always a relational position. To define it we must always identify the relative positions of the observer and the observed.

Invisibility as a condition of power may derive from a merely circumstantial situation, it may be the product of chance, but it can also result from deliberate social actions of profound symbolical significance. In the latter case, it may either reflect an imposed condition, determined by social structures or conventions (specific socio-political or cultural-symbolical circumstances), or provide the framework for a given strategic or tactical option devised to elude the gaze of others.

Let us consider the first situation. We know that under different historical and political circumstances, certain ethnic groups have not only been persecuted, but virtually 'rendered invisible', whether through their physical annihilation and forced displacement, or their concentration in distant areas, out of society's view. Ethnic ghettos are a clear example of this kind of phenomenon. The 'cleaning' operations which seek to rid city centers of undesirable citizens (homeless people, drug addicts, etc.) are another example. On the other hand, certain practices, conditions or rituals equally involve situations of social invisibility requiring the removal or hiding from public view of certain individuals.

The second case leads us to consider invisibility as the result of a voluntary and strategic decision. I am referring to cases in which, for a variety of reasons, individuals or groups create private spaces of retreat and seclusion.

The reasoning behind it is diverse and can range from the need for privacy within the domestic sphere to the desire to avoid unwanted onlookers. Here, I am interested in considering invisibility as a strategy used by certain groups as a way to escape the surveillance of authority or dominant society. Certain urban subcultures or social groups that are considered deviant, for instance, resort to strategies of relative invisibility as a way to pursue practices which are condemned by dominant morality or the legal system. This occurred, for example, in the cases of homosexual groups during historical periods of strong condemnation and even persecution (Humphreys, 1997), marihuana smokers (Becker, 1963), or graffiti writers (Campos, 2009a, 2009b, 2010), amongst numberless other examples.

So far we have alluded to the political character of the gaze. From this perspective, the 'observer' has been usually represented as the detainer of power (Foucault, 1975; Robins, 1996). Power is defined not only as the ability to impose a given vision (both metaphorically and literally) on someone or something that is deprived of that prerogative (either becoming merely an object of observation, or being unable to resist and avoid the gaze directed at him/her), but also as the control over the techno-symbolical apparatus that serves to maintain an asymmetrical regime of visibility (the Panopticon being the most paradigmatic example of this situation). But there is yet one other dimension that I find relevant to the notion of visibility as we have been discussing it. Power has always depended upon strategies of visibility for its sustenance and dominion. Power cannot simply be occupied and stated; it needs to be externalized in unequivocal and ostentatious terms. That is why we find a kind of 'staging', inherent to the exercise of power (Balandier, 1999), that reminds us constantly of its existence and of our place within its framework. This capacity of assertion in the public sphere, of making the presence of power within the visual narratives and landscapes inescapable, is not within the reach of every individual and social group.

In a recent essay about Lisbon's impoverished suburban neighborhoods, Zoetl (2013) clearly shows that the gazing competition between power (the state) and the socially excluded is a complex phenomenon, strongly marked by political issues. The young inhabitants of these boroughs feel permanently belittled by the vigilant gaze of the state (through the action of police forces) and mainstream mass media. They feel compelled to counter this oppressive surveillance by returning their own kind of gaze, one which possesses a frequently ignored political force – thus the urgency with which many of these excluded youths express themselves, creating centers of resistance that become manifest through various forms of cultural expression (rap, graffiti, etc.) intent on contesting the dominating gaze (Campos, 2013; Campos and Simões, 2011, 2014; Campos and Vaz, 2014).

VISUAL CULTURE IN THE CITY: THE DOUBLE FACE OF URBAN (IN)VISIBILITIES

How does the city provide a source of reflection on these issues? More specifically, how can we consider these problems in relation to the idea of the public space, which I consider to be the most relevant element in the social exchange operated by the gaze

within urban settings.² By definition, urban public space is everyone's, a democratic territory for the circulation (or hanging around) of its inhabitants. In such a terrain, exercising the gaze (to 'see' and 'be seen') becomes a particularly interesting object for an anthropological discussion on visual communication and visibility. In recent works, I suggested a dualist, and essentially political approach to how social actors make use of the territory (Campos, 2014). This duality was construed upon the notion of order and power, considering strategies of 'revelation', 'occultation' and 'surveillance', which are found in metropolitan spaces. Thus, even running the risk of presenting an oversimplified and reductionist explanation of this theme, we might say that the field of urban visibility, politically considered, involves two poles, which I will define as the spheres of the 'sacred' and the 'profane'. In this regard it is important to summon Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony', which contributes to supporting theoretically the perspective which I seek to expound.³ For Gramsci, the concept of hegemony points to the maintenance of a certain social order by means of developing ideological mechanisms leading dominated social groups to accept social asymmetries and their own subjugated condition. According to this Marxist author, the dominant class has to ensure its authority over its subordinates, not through coercion but by obtaining the latter's consent. This so-called consent is linked to the acceptance of hegemonic culture, dominant values and, consequently, of the *raison d'être* of the standing social structures. What we should bear in mind in the case in point is that hegemonic culture has different means of expression, namely through the ordering of physical space and the fabrication of landscape. In truth, power is, and has always been, 'staged', as Balandier (1999) points out. This kind of staging implies putting in place a whole arsenal of devices used to corroborate existing structures and procedures whose effectiveness in turn relies on their acceptance as natural and unquestionable.

The process of constructing a landscape involves an underlying validation of hegemonic values that reflect what we may define as the dominant ideological framework. This does not imply that the city is entirely taken over by dominant powers that shape it according to their own models. We know that the city is a terrain of conflict and negotiation, and that these take place mostly within the visible sphere. The city is also comprised of an assembly of social and geographic segments where a wide array of social actors and practices operate. While it is true that in the majority of Western societies public powers exert their dominion over the largest part of their urban territories, it is also widely known that in some areas other micro-relations of power operate and frequently threaten the hegemony of the state itself. Regimes of visibility are therefore a target for permanent contestation/conflict. Let us take the example of certain neighborhoods regarded as 'problematic' and a focus of criminal activities,⁴ where the presence of the state becomes residual and the apparatus of power is generally absent. In these micro-worlds, regimes of visibility are dominated by gangs or cartels, which try to gain control over those territories. Their power is in many cases 'staged', visually marked so as to leave no doubt, as in the case of the graffiti made by certain north-American gangs to delimit their territory (Ley and Cybriwsky, 1974).

In other words, despite mentioning two domains that belong in the field of visibility, I am perfectly aware of the volatile and conflictual nature of the social actors' positions and relations established within this field. Let us now resume the previously

made distinction. The first polarity involves the actions of the most powerful social actors in favor of the institutionalization of certain practices that seek the maintenance of the status quo, the reproduction of social structures and the consecration of their underlying ideologies. The second polarity signals the opposite, comprising actions that either become forms of resistance or subversion of the dominant regimes of visibility, or use them to confront hegemonic ideological contents.

Regarding the first polarity, I propose a classification that considers three aspects. In the first place, we can detect those that would constitute the 'languages of official ideology' (economical, political, religious, moral, etc.), secondly come the 'languages of regulation, surveillance and discipline', and lastly the 'languages of desire, seduction and spectacle'. The first are directly linked to how urban landscape and the objects within it are shaped by the most powerful agents, thus strengthening their authority and materializing the ideological foundations of that order. The urban landscape is filled by endless material examples that remind us not only of the existence of power throughout history, but also of the extent of its influence on society. The political, religious and economic institutions reveal themselves through a series of visible devices, their grandiosity being literally reflected in the ways in which they shape and occupy the landscape.

As Balandier (1999: 25) observes, 'the manifestations of power do not get along well with simplicity. They are generally characterized by grandiosity or ostentation, propriety or pomp, ceremonial or protocol'. The state's symbolically most relevant buildings, as well as religious temples or major economic enterprises, exhibit their opulence through their property and the security apparatus surrounding them. Furthermore, their power in society is also made patent through many other visible manifestations, which should be interpreted in terms of their geography (the nobility of places), their material properties (the wealth of constructions) and their magnitude (the quantity and plurality of the institutions' physical instances). Monuments and historical patrimony also reveal the institutionalization of a historical narrative construed by dominant groups, reproducing the national values that are currently considered more consensual. In this group we count the memorials erected to the nation's heroes, to historical events or to common values, all of which seek to strengthen the collective spirit (Figures 16.1–16.4). Directly linked to this dimension, we find those systems operating within the sphere of the visible to guarantee the maintenance of order and of the status quo, and which may be understood as forms of surveillance, regulation and discipline (Figures 16.5–16.7). As Foucault (1975) so aptly demonstrated, the gaze has historically been used as a tool of power. Currently, increasingly sophisticated surveillance devices ensure power's virtual omnipresence, its pervasive gaze extending over the whole territory. But I am not just referring to the surveilling gaze, but also to the features in the urban landscape that act as devices for the visual communication of order and regulation, ensuring citizens' compliance to a set of rules. In this category we include traffic signs, video-surveillance cameras, police and military presence, private security officers, etc. While some of these devices, such as public signaling, serve their purpose merely by becoming visible, others have a double function of seeing and being seen.



Figure 16.1 Portuguese Parliament House



Figure 16.2 Monument to the victims of the Great War

Campos, R. (2017). "On urban (in)visibilities". In John Hannigan & Greg Richards (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of New Urban Studies* (pp. 232-249). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC, Melbourne: Sage Publications.



Figure 16.3 Headquarters of the Portuguese National Bank, Caixa Geral de Depósitos



Figure 16.4 Centro Cultural de Belém/Belém Cultural Center (Lisbon)



Figure 16.5 Traffic signs



Figure 16.6 Traffic lights (Lisbon)



Figure 16.7 Video-surveillance cameras (Lisbon)

Lastly, I would like to recall the importance of what I have labeled the 'languages of desire, seduction and spectacle', which are deeply connected to a markedly consumeristic culture based on the power of images. I have no doubt that images and consumer goods are relevant actors of our present urban landscape, and that the central position they occupy in our visible horizon reflects their preponderance in our everyday life and imagination. Some might find it strange that I place this dimension under the sign of the 'sacred'. However, in contemporary capitalist societies, which are largely secular and where religion has lost the regulatory and symbolical weight it held in the past, consumption assumes an extremely prominent position from a symbolical point of view. Nowadays consumption has become an important element not only in the creation of emotional, but also of identity and cultural bonds, as various authors have claimed (Baudrillard, 1995; Ewen, 1988; Featherstone, 1991; Jameson, 2001). To this we have to add the power that the private sector and the large multinational corporations hold over how urban space is shaped. This becomes obvious due to their capacity not just to purchase property, but also to produce landscape. In view of this, to a great extent the city mirrors the consumerism of its society, becoming a repository of brands, products and imagination. Shop-window displays, billboards, public transports and buildings covered by advertisements, testify to this condition (Figures 16.8 and 16.9).



Figure 16.8 Shop Window (Lisbon)



Figure 16.9 Outdoor advertisement (Lisbon)

In the opposite direction, we find different instances of a more narrow and contained nature, revealing more or less obvious or ingenious ways to counter the hegemony of the powerful and their regimes of visibility. These are usually popular forms of creativity, spontaneity or resistance, which undermine the ordered and regulated system, the predictable and uneventful nature of metropolitan life and of its landscapes. These forms of expression may have a more or less pronounced political character. I do not intend to suggest that they all have an obvious or conscious political facet, since they may be more concerned with entertainment or aesthetic value. But even these, insofar as they belong in the field of confrontation, revocation or suspension of the established order, summon a political dimension that cannot be ignored. Throughout history, different forms of popular culture have drawn on this disruptive drive, on the cathartic energy released by gestures of disorder, inversion and defiance of hegemonic powers (secular or religious) (Balandier, 1999). I have already invoked Gramsci's definition of hegemony, and I would now like to summon de Certeau and his 'tactics':

Many everyday practices ... are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many 'ways of operating': victories of the 'weak' over the 'strong' (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, 'hunter's cunning', maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike. (de Certeau, 1984: xix)

On this side of the polarity, I propose a classification that considers two dimensions. The first of these refers to the 'counter-hegemonic languages' that, through various means, challenge the dominant visual or cultural regime. The second contemplates those 'minority or peripheral languages', which, despite not directly confronting power, give rise to eccentric, creative, hybrid and non-consensual communicational reservoirs. These two categories are often overlapping. In any case, they generally presuppose actions that originate in social groups which maintain a relation of antagonism or resistance to the establishment or dominant social norms.

Let us begin with the first dimension. I consider that it involves an explicit action in the political sphere, insofar as it implies the existence of individual and collective manifestations

that seek to shake conventions and hegemonies. Such actions may be directed at the dominant ideological system, but they can equally defy how the city is used and planned, the existing urban visual regime, etc. In other words, they involve actions in the domain of visibility whose contents, languages or practices upset the status quo.

Thus, on the one hand we have actions with a semiotic character. I proposed the term 'aesthetics of transgression' (Campos, 2013) to address those aesthetic cultural expressions and creations that in one way or another use various means of communication to create disruptive episodes that confront or suspend official order and social conventions. We might call them forms of 'semiotic guerrilla', to use Eco's famous definition as applied by Hebdige (1976) to subcultural styles,⁵ which are generally vernacular in nature, used by the common people to question the power of dominant social institutions. A common element of graffiti works, unveiling their transgressive nature, is the satirical or offensive content, the obvious desire to challenge prevailing beliefs, to mock the order and the symbols of power (Figures 16.10–16.12).



Figure 16.10 Sticker placed on a banking advertisement (Lisbon)

Campos, R. (2017). "On urban (in)visibilities". In John Hannigan & Greg Richards (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of New Urban Studies* (pp. 232-249). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC, Melbourne: Sage Publications.



Figure 16.11 Illegal writings (Lisbon)



Figure 16.12 Illegal mural graffiti (Hall of Fame), (Lisbon)

Giving visibility to these forms of expression is therefore not just an aesthetic manifestation, but also a political one. A good example of this can be found in illegal graffiti, or picho, in the case of Brazil. The dissemination of these illegal enunciations throughout the urban landscape forces official powers to react, not just through preventive measures such as the development of surveillance devices, but also through erasure techniques meant to make these forms of 'symbolic pollution' invisible.⁶ This need for cleaning becomes all the more important the nobler the urban spaces threatened by these expressions, since these represent and preserve the fundamental collective values (historical, patrimonial, symbolical, economical, etc.) and are thus considered inviolable. A picho or illegal graffiti executed in a noble area or object is a provocation that must be swiftly suppressed (made invisible).⁷ This means that what bothers the authorities (and forces them to react) is that graffiti offends state and capital hegemony in urban landscape management. Therefore, the attack on graffiti is a form of defending the aesthetics of authority (Ferrell, 1996) and the visual vocabulary of moral order (Austin, 2010).

But we cannot ignore actions whose communicative impact is not limited to their resulting semiotic content. In some cases, the field of visibility is seized to exercise certain practices with a deep social significance. In this category we might include those actions which challenge the instituted powers' ordered and monitored city. Subverting the functional nature of certain urban features, for instance, is a form of resistance to the regulated and planned city. Thus, in Lisbon certain features of the historical and monumental district are regularly used by dozens of skaters who find there perfect conditions for their activity, reconfiguring the function of such places, 'desacralizing' them. In other, more episodic instances, we find operations of near 'guerrilla' or 'insurgency' type that seize the city and its resources through highly visual manifestations. In this respect, the urban public space has been the main stage for demonstrations that occur in the field of the visible, subverting public order and defying power. These demonstrations therefore have a performative character which must be underlined, since they constitute staging strategies that make use of visibility. The impact these events at the same time have on the media leads me to believe that their social actors are perfectly aware of the relevance and communicational amplitude of these actions. Thus a certain degree of 'spectacularization' is used in urban protest as a communication tactic. Several recent examples could be invoked, such as the 'acampadas' in Spain, or the Occupy movement, which have achieved global proportions.

Let us now focus on the second dimension, concerning the 'peripheral and marginal languages'. My understanding is that these do not necessarily have to be linked to explicitly political actions, which does not mean that they do not have a political role. In this case, I am referring to sociocultural bastions occupying a minority, subordinate and symbolically despised position within a given society. Not incidentally, many of the cultural forms of expression originating from said contexts are ignored or disparaged, which is tantamount to a certain symbolic effacement of those communities. In other cases, the communities or groups themselves are subjected to processes of invisibility within the urban landscape, which result, for instance, from their placement in less noble parts of the city, or the erasure of signs of their presence or historical memory. In

fact, many of these groups' visual expressions (dress codes, gestures, artifacts, etc.) collide with dominant models, generating situations of cultural clash and rejection. We are therefore talking about singular, peripheral and marginal visual cultures.

It is thus not a coincidence that certain ethnic ghettos become visually distinctive territories, what Jerome Krase (2004) calls 'vernacular ethnic landscapes'. These become ethnically and socially homogenous urban ghettos, where the regulatory presence of official institutions is virtually absent, and they are thus unbound by the dominant taste imposed by official regulations, as occurs for example in several boroughs within the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (Campos and Vaz, 2014). These neighborhoods provide particularly interesting cases for reflecting upon questions of visibility, insofar as their relative invisibility to the majority of citizens⁸ and the lack of official regulation allow them to become 'micro-landscapes' that have their own identity, as kinds of 'collective private spaces' that follow their own internal principles of visibility.

In this case, the memories, celebrations and alternative role models are celebrated and made present in the cityscape (Figures 16.13 and 16.14). The historical narrative is therefore not controlled by the official instances, a fact which is actually made manifest in different evocations that demonstrate resistance to the powers of the state and dominant normativity.

Table 16.1 seeks to summarize my proposed classification of urban visual culture, bearing in mind the two polarities presented above.



Figure 16.13 Mural Painting celebrating Amílcar Cabral⁹ (Cova da Moura)¹⁰

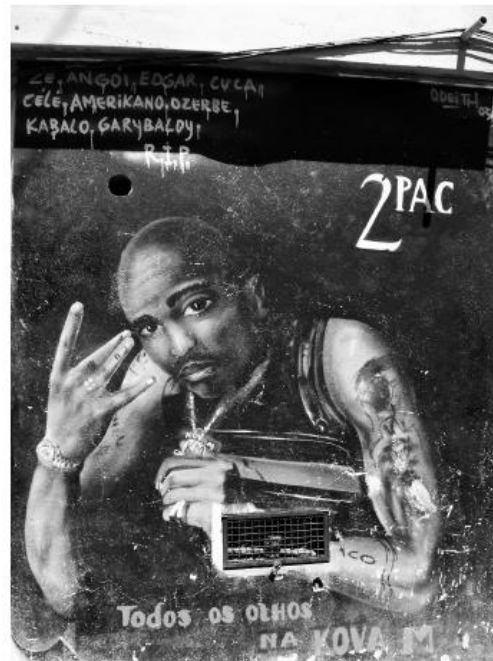


Figure 16.14 Memorial to resident youth murder victims (Cova da Moura)

Table 16.1 Urban visual culture polarities

'Sacred'	'Profane'
'Languages of official ideology'	
'Languages of regulation, surveillance and discipline'	'Counter-hegemonic languages'
'Languages of desire, seduction and spectacle'	'Minority and peripheral languages'

We should mention that the relation between these two polarities ('sacred' and 'profane'), is not stationary, much less rigid. Therefore, not only do we find areas of darkness and overlap, but the very meaning of urban artifacts and certain languages is in constant transformation. Roland Barthes, in a seminal work from the 1960s (Barthes, 1988 [1967]), had already highlighted the difficulty of developing a semiology of the urban, given that the language of the city is constantly shifting. Thus, certain urban languages and artifacts oscillate in their proximity to one or another pole. It is actually common to find certain visual manifestations that are originally transgressive or marginal to be gradually reconfigured and appropriated by social actors who are closer to the mainstream. Consider, for instance, the slow process of legitimation of graffiti and street art, which went from being transgressive and illegal languages to gradually becoming legitimate aesthetic and artistic forms of expression. This kind of social legitimation is enabled by the concrete action of a number of social actors and institutions (the media, local authorities, the art world, etc.). Thus, certain marginal and transgressive languages can gradually be reconverted semiotically and ideologically to

become economically, aesthetically and symbolically appealing, assuming new roles within the urban landscape.

CONCLUSION

The examples we have been considering are far from exhausting the kind of reflection presented here. The problem of visual communication in metropolitan settings is complex and leads to a profusion of empirical objects that can be subject to multiple perspectives. What becomes incontrovertible is the dimension of visibility, which in itself becomes an essential feature for anyone interested in studying community life. Not just because vision occupies the center of most actions involved in the exploration of reality, but mainly because the latter is culturally shaped, given that the way in which the horizon of the visible (and the invisible) is construed is revealing of profoundly significant individual and social choices. Why, and under what circumstances do certain elements, symbols, artifacts, groups or individuals have to be visible while others remain hidden? These are the greater questions we have to pose. Such an inquiry becomes all the more urgent as we realize that besides conferring a central role on vision, our society has multiplied the technical devices used to aid in the visual gauging of the world. Technology has thus become a major actor in the field of visibility. The ability to see is not evenly distributed, and the possession of technological devices becomes a determining factor in deciding how relations are established within the visible field.

When we talk of the city, we are alluding to an extensive territory, inhabited by a large quantity of people with many different origins and customs. The physical space of the city is therefore a vast and multifaceted landscape, reflecting the diversity of its people and their actions on and in the city. The territory communicates with us. The territory is a repository of symbols that is open to its inhabitants' interpretation. While there are powerful actors who act on the space and shape it, it is also true that the less powerful are not deprived of doing the same. It is in the field of visibility where cultural identities, symbolical conflicts and aesthetic statements are played out. The state exhibits its authority through its police forces, its official buildings and the monuments or official acts of the state. The market and its corporations flaunt their goods through advertising that pervades the city; the financial sector demonstrates its power through the erection of imposing buildings. But amidst this ordered landscape, there are fissures, unregulated spaces giving rise to a variety of disruptive expressions. All relations of power are marked by exercises of revelation, occultation and surveillance, where the different actors position themselves accordingly. The reflections and images presented here have striven precisely to stimulate debate around this issue. I do not pretend to present a definitive framework of analysis for this phenomenon. On the contrary, I acknowledge the fragilities resulting from the attempt to create a taxonomy or structure of interpretation for urban visual culture, when it encompasses such a wide range of human operations and creations. However, I hope to have contributed to encouraging the anthropological and sociological debate on issues that have been largely neglected by these fields.

NOTES

¹ On this topic, see the stimulating volume edited by Brighenti (2009), which gathers a variety of perspectives on the significance of walls.

² Private space is always reserved to the gaze of a few; it is the domain of privacy. Therefore, there is a strong correlation between the private and the invisible, and inversely, between the public and the visible. However, the private sphere is not entirely opaque. There are two dimensions, one which belongs to the sphere of invisibility and is protected from the outside (by walls, protection, etc.), and another which belongs to the domain of the visible and is available to the gaze of others (the outdoors of houses and buildings, their gardens, etc.). Goffman's (1999) theorization is relevant here, as it distinguishes between the 'backstage' and the 'frontstage' in how we present ourselves to others. In the case in point, if we apply this notion to the physical setting of residential spaces, the internal and private space can be seen as the 'backstage', invisible to others (except as guests), while those parts which are exposed and visible from the outside are the 'frontstage', reflecting how we represent our habitat.

³ The mention of Gramsci stems from the works of several authors connected to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, where, during the 1970s and 1980s, they developed an important theoretical corpus on the so-called urban youth subcultures. Part of the inspiration for their analysis of youth subcultures of that period derived from Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which explained how the mechanisms of acceptance of dominant ideologies functioned. See for instance the works of Hebdige (1996) and Hall and Jefferson (1976).

⁴ Drug trafficking being the most common example.

⁵ In his work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Hebdige underlines the subversive power of subcultural styles as devices of semiotic guerrilla action. According to this author, subcultural styles afford a kind of inversion in the symbolical order of things. The surprise, shock and outrage, as well as panic, caused in the common citizen by these forms of communication derive precisely from this power to disrupt an ontological order.

⁶ Douglas' idea of symbolic pollution (1991) has been applied by several scholars (Campos, 2009b) to explain the social aversion caused by this phenomenon.

⁷ Inversely, 'invisible terrains' are those that are not exposed in the more central public sphere and are thus kept more secluded, and which, having a peripheral or marginal character, are less exposed to the surveillance of power and its normative action. Let us think of the widely known writings found on public bathrooms, or on the walls of suburban areas or thoroughfares (for example, overpasses), etc. In fact, these are usually accompanied by a host of other 'symbolically polluting' elements which go against the model of the aseptic and normative city. The fact that they remain relatively invisible to the eyes of power also favors the emergence of singular visual landscapes.

⁸ In contrast and ironically, these neighborhoods are made visible in the media, who often seek to construe a set of images about the so-called 'critical neighborhoods'. The fact that the state's regulatory power is also negligible in these settings does not invalidate the frequent incursions of police forces who seek, through these 'performances of strength', to signal the presence of the state and the respect for normalcy and order. On this topic see the article by Zoetl (2013), which addresses these questions, focusing on some of Lisbon Metropolitan Area's ethnic neighborhoods.

⁹ Amílcar Cabral was one of the founders of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo-Verde PAIGC).

¹⁰ Cova da Moura is a self-built, clandestine neighbourhood that sprouted in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area during the 1970s and 1980s. In many ways, this neighbourhood has poor living conditions and precarious urban infrastructures. It is mostly inhabited by individuals and families of African descent or immigrants from African countries, particularly Cabo Verde.

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